

A MENACE TO CITIES

Professor Fessenden Sounds a Note of Warning.

Cities Not Adapted to Operate Business Enterprises—Loss of Capital Through New Developments—The Danger a Real One.

It is becoming more and more generally recognized that undertakings founded on the great public needs of the highly organized society of modern times should be controlled by society. Whether, having the power, it is advisable that municipalities should actually engage in such undertakings or whether they should merely maintain their control, as it has been aptly put, through their powers as a landlord, is a matter which will be determined by the municipalities from political, social and economic as well as engineering considerations.

Considering the question from its engineering side alone, it is found that from the very essential nature of the matter only a certain class of engineering undertakings can be efficiently and properly operated by states or municipalities. It is very important that this limitation should be recognized, as where the limitation has been overstepped it has resulted in heavy financial losses to the governing bodies immediately concerned. It has seriously checked development in engineering lines, and these results have in consequence afforded a strong argument to those opposed to municipal operation of public utilities.

It is true that under state or municipal operation some minor and sporadic developments may be expected, but nothing of a general or important character. Important developments generally come only from the hands of individuals or bodies responsible only to themselves and provided with the incentive of a large profit. The elimination of self responsibility and incentive would inevitably produce a condition in industrial and scientific development analogous to the dark ages.

It is to be noted that this conclusion is derived from engineering considerations alone and does not include any consideration from the political, social or economic side. There may, it is conceivable, be political, social and economic considerations which tend to affect this limitation. Considered, however, from the engineering standpoint alone there can be no question but that the field of state and municipal operation should be limited to undertakings in which there is no immediate prospect of or need for improved method.

A danger which is always associated with the ownership of industrial undertakings is that the capital invested may be lost through the development of new and cheaper methods and processes. The extent to which industrial machinery of certain types is rendered obsolete by new improvements is not always realized. The writer is personally acquainted with one street car railroad plant in which the entire electrical equipment of the power house was thrown out and replaced with improved machinery four times within a period of ten years. The Carnegie company is reported, correctly, it is believed, to have scrapped on one occasion more than \$1,000,000 worth of new machinery which had never been used.

This has already become a serious matter for many municipalities which have engaged in undertakings lying outside of the engineering limits defined above. Many of these municipalities installed plants for the production of electric light at a time prior to the advent of important improvements in generating and distributing electricity, and as these municipalities in common with most municipalities made no proper allowance for depreciation the capital invested has been practically lost, and in addition the cost of electric light to the consumer is much higher than it is in other places equipped with later and more economical types of machinery. In addition, heavy and expensive repairs have been necessary and the taxes correspondingly increased. This has reacted upon the municipalities, since the heavy rates have caused manufacturers to move away to other towns, and this again has still further increased the burden upon those remaining. There are already indications that a considerable number of these municipalities which have engaged in improper undertakings are entering upon a period of financial difficulty.—R. A. Fessenden.

As a Socialist Sees It. Every recognized authority on Socialist economics, from Marx to Ferri, has been and is an avowed economic evolutionist. They all without exception recognize that public ownership under capitalism must come before the full Socialist programme can meet with realization.

When the Socialist party shall succeed to power in municipality, state or nation it will feel that the holdings of its capitalist predecessors. Every dollar's worth of property that we can wrest from private capitalism through public ownership will fall into the hands of the Socialist party without a struggle upon its accession to power.—International Socialist Review.

What Government Is For. It is the appropriate function of the government to safeguard the individual and to see that the game of business is fairly played, that the cards are held above the table and that everybody is given a square deal. It is not the appropriate function of the government to sit in the game.—Hon. Leslie M. Shaw.

N. & W. Norfolk & Western R.R.

Schedule Effective NOV. 25, 1906.

Lv. Tazewell for Norton. 10:15 a. m. 3:24 p. m.

For Bluefield. 1:35 p. m. 6:51 p. m.

From Bluefield East Bound. 9:35 a. m. for East Radford, Roanoke, Lynchburg, Norfolk and all points on Shenandoah division. Pullman sleeper and cafe car Roanoke. Parlor car Roanoke to Norfolk. Pullman sleeper Roanoke to New York via Hagerstown.

8:15 a. m. daily East Radford for Roanoke and intermediate stations. 2:55 p. m. daily for Roanoke, Lynchburg and intermediate stations and the Shenandoah Valley. Pullman sleeper Welch to Philadelphia via Hagerstown. 8:33 p. m. for Roanoke, Lynchburg, Richmond, Norfolk. Pullman sleeper to Roanoke and Lynchburg. Richmond and Norfolk cafe car.

Westbound. 9:08 a. m. for Kenova, Portsmouth, Columbus, St. Louis and the west. Pullman sleeper to Columbus Cafe car. 8:30 p. m. for Kenova, Portsmouth, Cincinnati, Columbus, West and Northwest. Pullman sleeper Bluefield to Cincinnati, and Bluefield to Columbus, cafe car to Williamson.

5:50 a. m. and 2:40 for Welch and intermediate stations. Write for Rates, Maps, Time-Table, Descriptive pamphlets to any station Agent, or to W. B. Beville, General Passenger Agent, M. F. Bragg, Traveling Passenger Agent, Roanoke, Virginia.



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AN HONEST GRAFTER

A Glimpse Into the Future of Municipal Ownership.

A Thumb Nail Sketch of a "Practical Politician"—The Profits of an All Around "Servant of the People, Who Seen His Opportunities and Took 'Em."

"Honest graft" will reach its highest level when, as predicted by the enthusiasts, the principles of municipal ownership are accepted by New York and the city controls the trolley lines, the electric light and gas works and all the ferries as well as the water-works and the police, the fire and the street departments.

Then such patriots as George Washington Plunkitt, for many years organization leader of the Fifteenth district in New York, will reap rewards of greater magnitude than they have ever been able to gather under the present order of things.

Perhaps you have never heard about Mr. Plunkitt's "honest graft" schemes. He told about them himself in a book published last year, which was introduced by a paragraph lauding him as a "veteran leader of the organization," signed by its greatest chief.

Plunkitt was sore because there were some objections to graft being made out of the city by men like him, and in the first chapter of his book he uttered a vigorous protest. "Blackmailin' gamblers, saloon keepers, disorderly people, etc.," he admitted to be wrong. That was "dishonest graft."

"But," he added, "there's an honest graft, and I'm an example of how it works. I seen my opportunities and I took 'em."

Mr. Plunkitt's explanation of how he did these things will illuminate the possibilities of future municipal ownership days, if they ever come.

After elucidating the ways he was "tipped off" at various times by members of his party—the party in power—when new bridges, new parks, new streets were to be opened, so that he might invest in real estate likely to rise in price from the improvements contemplated, he adds: "I haven't confined myself to land. Anything that pays is in my line." Then he gives a specific instance:

Learning that the city was about to repave a certain street and so would have several hundred thousand old paving blocks to sell, he was "on hand to buy," and he "knew just what they were worth." But a newspaper "tried to do him" and got some outside men from Brooklyn and New Jersey to bid against him. Mr. Plunkitt's own words tell the story best:

"Was I done? Not much. I went to each of the men and said, 'How many of those 250,000 stones do you want?' One said 20,000, and another wanted 15,000, and another wanted 10,000. I said, 'All right; let me bid for the lot, and I'll give each of you all you want for nothin'.'"

"They agreed, of course. Then the auctioneer yelled, 'How much am I bid for these fine payin' stones?'"

"Two dollars and fifty cents," says I.

"Two dollars and fifty cents!" screamed the auctioneer. "Oh, that's a joke. Give me a real bid."

"He found the bid was real enough. My rivals stood silent. I got the lot for \$2.50 and gave them their share. That's how the attempt to do Plunkitt ended, and that's how all such attempts end."

It is hardly necessary, in the light of this authentic statement of "honest grafts" workings, to enlarge upon the extended opportunities that would come to the men of the Plunkitt stamp were the dream of municipal ownership to come true. Plunkitt says "most politicians who are accused of robbin' the city get rich the same way" he did. "They didn't steal a dollar from the city. They just seen their opportunities and took them."

While in the legislature Plunkitt introduced the bills that provided for the outlying parks of New York, the Harlem river speedway, the Washington bridge, the One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street viaduct, additions to the Museum of Natural History and many other important public improvements. He is now a millionaire. Under the proposed order of things, with city control of everything, he might become a billionaire.

Under municipal ownership of all public utilities in New York—and in most other cities in fact—politicians like Plunkitt, who at different times has been elected state senator, assemblyman, county supervisor and alderman by his fellow citizens, besides serving as police magistrate for one term, and who boasts of his record in filling four public offices in one year and drawing salaries from three of them at the same time, would flourish like a whole grove of green bay trees.

Go Slow on City Ownership. Until politics in America is purified far beyond its present condition any large experiment in government ownership may be called a "thief breeder" with much safety. The more authority there is vested in the hands of politicians (with all due deference to our national administration)

MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP.

All Right in Theory, but Breaks Down in Practice.

Theoretically there is so much in municipal ownership of public utilities that the practical carrying out of its attractive features appears simple and of no serious moment, and for a municipality to take over and run water, lights, sewerage and even transportation appeals to taxpayers, and the trade is made without the first assurance that the conduct of these properties will be along practical and business lines.

It is the failure to assure the practical that works the evil, for municipal ownership is a general ownership, and a general ownership results too easily in its being no special business of any citizen or taxpayer to look into or inquire after the conduct of the properties under control. This leaves the management to a few, who soon find that they have only themselves to account to, that people are too busy to demand accountings and taxpayers accept any kind of report, just so there is the appearance of all being right and light, water, sewerage, etc., are given.

It is this indifference and neglect on the part of taxpayers to take note of municipal affairs which make municipal ownership of public utilities a hazardous and expensive matter. The theory of municipal ownership, with its great saving to each taxpayer, the extra service given and the great profits resulting, can all be placed in figures beforehand, but it is a failure unless the taxpayers shall give earnest and serious heed to the conduct of these public utilities, for unless this is done they will wake up some day with broken down properties and a big bond issue to make good.—Newbern Weekly Journal.

THE GREAT TRANSITION.

Public Property Wasted Because "It Costs Nothing, You Know."

"Hello!" said I. "What's that?" And I stopped to pick it up.

"That?" replied the boy who happened to be passing through the school yard with me. "That is nothing but a lead pencil."

"But it is a whole one," said I, "and with a rubber on the end."

"What! Do you mean to tell me that you have seen this here before?"

"Yes, everybody's seen it."

"All the children in your school have seen this lying here day after day and not one boy has picked it up?"

"Of course. What should we pick it up for? There's plenty in the school-house. The town buys 'em."

And I had been given a text for a long meditation. Not pick up a whole new lead pencil? And a pencil with a rubber on it!

When I was a boy we prized even slate pencils. A boy who looked anybody's slate pencil was baited until he gave it up, but a lead pencil—we fought for lead pencils as the Greeks and Trojans fought for Helen. We scoured the countryside for old horsehoes to sell to the blacksmith for money enough to buy a lead pencil, and, having it, we cut our private mark on it, guarded it, kept it as our last resource in trade. Many a time a precious two inch lead pencil has turned an important jack-knife trade one way or the other. I never had but one lead pencil at a time and very often hardly that until I was fifteen years old. And these ten-year-olds scorn to pick up a whole one with a rubber! Think of it! The best eraser I had was a piece of rubber boot heel!—Henry T. Bailey in Journal of Education.

A DAY OF RECKONING.

You Cannot Fool All of the People All of the Time.

The recent condemnation as unfit for further service of a number of gas and electric light plants and the closing down of some of them at a dead loss to the taxpayers should serve as a warning to other cities, for this is the fate that is likely to overtake all such plants in the long run. For the first year or two, when no expensive repairs are needed and the plant is thoroughly up to date, it ought not to be difficult to make a good showing. For a few years longer the bad bookkeeping and inadequate reports, that are unfortunately the rule rather than the exception, may blind the citizens to the deterioration of the plant and to its increasing losses. But the day of reckoning inevitably comes when breakdown, bad service or demand for new equipment that cannot masquerade as "extensions" causes an investigation, and then it becomes evident that the plant has been a losing proposition almost from the start. No plant should be accepted as a concession of successful municipal management until it has been operated for several years and then examined by expert engineers and accountants.

Carelessness, Not Graft.

At a local government board inquiry held at West Ham, London, to sanction the borrowing by the corporation of £62,300 for electricity extensions it stated that